Natural Landscaping

Protecting Bloomington’s natural resources is a priority for many residents. However, habitat loss due to land development and other human activities continues to increase in Bloomington and across the nation. Urban sprawl has brought more people into areas previously functioning as wildlife habitat. Landscapes associated with human development typically consist of well-manicured lawns, which frequently rely on chemicals and high water use. Lawn turf is not beneficial to wildlife and does not promote biodiversity.

**Natural landscaping** is a method of gardening or landscaping that promotes environmentally-balanced and sustainable practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities. Practicing natural landscaping leads to many benefits that include improving water, air and soil quality; controlling soil erosion; reducing sedimentation; conserving water; beautifying the land; and increasing available habitat and resources to attract desirable wildlife.

---

**What are native plants?**

Native plants are the trees, shrubs, flowers, grasses, ferns and other plants that have evolved in a specific location, such as Bloomington, over thousands of years. In the United States, native plants are considered to be those present prior to European settlement. These plants have adapted to local growing conditions, such as temperature, rainfall, soils and topography. Native plants also coevolved with locally adapted animals and microbes. Thus, native plants will attract native songbirds, butterflies and other wildlife.

---

**How should I begin?**

1. Define your goals. Ask yourself if you want to attract butterflies? Birds? Create places to sit? Look around other yards for inspiration or browse gardening books and web pages for ideas.
2. Draw the basic layout of your property on paper. Imagine how it will look from inside your house as well as when outside. Mark large trees or other features.
3. Start small. Landscape a small section of your yard at a time, like planning rooms in a house. Consider how you can reach your goals in each space.
4. Define your native plantings with a sign, a border made of rocks or vegetation, or a fence.
5. Talk with your neighbors. You may inspire others to practice natural landscaping.
6. For larger projects, you may wish to consult a landscaping professional or Backyard Wildlife Habitat Steward. Stewards are trained to help Bloomington citizens create and restore wildlife habitat. You can contact a local Steward through the Center for Sustainable Living (csloffice@gmail.com or 332-8796).
Selected Native Plants

The list below features native plants highlighted in this series. For a complete listing of Bloomington natives, refer to the “Natural Landscaping HANDbook” available from the City of Bloomington Housing and Neighborhood Development Department (349-3420).

FOR NATIVE PRAIRIE GARDEN
Big Bluestem
Prairie Blazing Star
Butterflyweed
Indian Grass
Purple Coneflower
Purple Prairie Clover
Side-Oats Grama
Stiff Goldenrod
Switch Grass

FOR NATIVE WOODLAND GARDEN
Blue Phlox
Christmas Fern
Celandine Poppy
Columbine
Ostrich Fern
Coralberrry

FOR SHADY SITES
Arrowwood Viburnum
Larkspur
Gray Dogwood
New England Aster
Virginia Bluebells
Wild Bergamot (Bee-balm)

FOR WET SITES
American Highbush Cranberry
Buttonbush
Great Blue Lobelia
Queen-of-the-Prairie
Swamp Milkweed
Sweet Joe-Pye Weed
Turtlehead

FOR POND OR STREAM SIDE
Broadleaf Arrowhead
White Waterlily
American Lotus
Pickerel Weed
Monkey Flower
Blue Flag Iris
Water-shield
Bottlebrush Sedge
Soft Rush
Scouring Rush

Where to Go for Native Plants

Abell Nursery
7667 W. State Road 45
Bloomington IN 47403
Phone: 812-825-2530
Website: www.abellnurseryonline.com

Bloomington Valley Nursery
5230 S. Old Highway 37
Bloomington IN 47401
Phone: 812-824-8813

Designscape Horticultural Services
2877 South T.C. Steele Rd.
Nashville, IN 474408
Phone: 812-988-8900
Website: www.desighort.com

May’s Greenhouse
6280 S. Old Highway 37
Bloomington IN 47401
Phone: 812-824-8630
Website: www.maysgreenhouse.net

Stranger’s Hill Greenhouses and Farm
2815 Louden Road
Bloomington IN 47404
Phone: 812-876-6520
Email: leejones@kiva.net

Also, native plants may be available at:
Bloomington Community Farmers’ Market (Seasonal)
Showers Building 401 N. Morton
Bloomington IN 47403
Phone: 812-349-3738
Website: www.bloomington.in.gov/parks

NOTE: Collecting native plants from the wild is unethical. Purchase native plants only from reputable nurseries.

References:
-Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society
  www.inpaws.org